

From: Mike Harman [REDACTED]
Date: March 19, 2022 at 5:46:07 PM EDT
To: tmwoody@hanovercounty.gov
Subject: Very Concerned

Lieutenant Colonel Woody,

My desire is to get this to Sheriff Hines, however I didn't want to use the general email inbox, as I would rather this stay confidential for now.

My name is Mike Harman, Jr., and I am a 45-year Hanover County resident, first and foremost. I am also a fitness coach in Ashland for a fairly new member of ours by the name of Matt Keeley, who I have been made aware has been recently fired from the Hanover Sheriff's Office.

Now I don't know all the details, but I have talked with Matt and his family about the plight they are now in and what our community gym could do to help.

The premise of Matt's firing seems to hinge on his unwillingness to wear a mask. Without going into the debate and details of such a stance, I fully support his right to do so.

I also understand the predicament into which jurisdictions have been placed with such a high pressure of perceived public safety and the political intimidation that seems to have come along with it. In my personal opinion, it has gotten very carried away. We have lost sight of what's important and much of the response is simply theatrics. We must get back to the truth.

Matt is one of the hardest workers in our gym. What we do is not easy or for the faint of heart. From the minute I met him and saw his work ethic, I could tell he would fit in well. His attack on our workouts is unrelenting and more than makes up for his smaller stature, which we have never allowed our members to use as an excuse, including our women and our youth members. The world doesn't care. It will indiscriminately dish out its harsh ways regardless of who you are. You all know this well in your line of business.

To me, Matt exemplifies what an organization like yours would want in a deputy. He is most certainly what I as a citizen want if I ever have to call on you to respond.

Maybe more citizens of Hanover would like to know that we fired a man that went from a graduate of The Citadel, to a combat veteran of the United States Marine Corps, to a 12-year veteran of your department with 10 of them as a SWAT Team member, and amongst other great attributes, a 2020 Valor Award recipient from both the Virginia Sheriff's Association and the Virginia Chiefs of Police Association.

Please tell me that we did not treat the cream of the crop of our society, one who was willing to get fired over his oath to our country and its constitution - one who wore the patch of Patrick Henry's birthplace on his uniform sleeve fully understanding the importance of "Liberty or Death" - please tell me we didn't let *that* guy down.

Please tell me that we did not hire one of our nation's best only to let him go - because of his stance to not wear a mask - a requirement that is debatable at best and clearly misunderstood by the medical,

EXHIBIT A

science, and safety community no more obvious than its numerous changes and corrections to previous false assumptions.

As I hope you know, Matt has a wife and two kids. He has very strong family, moral, and ethical values, but none that should ever be looked down upon as an exceptional employee, especially when to me they qualify and align so clearly with the requirements and dangers of law enforcement.

While right now maybe they are viewed as "not in alignment" with the department's, that couldn't be farther from the truth and doesn't seem to have been true for the past 12 years. If there *have* been issues, I would expect there to be a list of progressive disciplinary actions taken against him up to this point, instead of achievements, accolades, and awards.

You all may personally disagree with his stance, his logic, and his seeming political affiliation - but those differences should bear no part in considering whether he is worthy of being a Hanover County deputy.

What I would also be willing to bet is that you don't know his history, or his failures, or his hardships, or the betrayal he feels from a country that he has so vigorously defended. It's not for you or me to judge. But now he gets it locally as well. His own workplace has also destroyed his worth.

I don't believe this can be viewed as a "choice" Matt made. He, like so many others - LEO, firefighters, military personnel, nurses, doctors, and the list goes on - have been forced to go against sincerely held convictions about their own bodies over the past 2 years, and it's flat out wrong.

We cannot continue to pretend that vaccinations and masks protect others the way it was conveyed to us, and use that as weaponry against our own people.

Instead, I think this one requires us to look at ourselves and truly deploy some humility and maybe ask what could have been done better to accommodate someone like Matt until we get through this dark and heavy time in our nation. He was more than capable of continuing to patrol with great integrity.

If all of the subjective mask mandates were lifted at the end of the month - in the courts, in businesses, at MRMC and other facilities - would firing him really have been the right call? A mandate so easily retractable could cause the loss of someone's job?

Sure, we can cite "policy violation" and go down the weak path of using it as the reason for his firing, but what about Matt's rights? I actually admire him more for standing up. But it shouldn't cost him his job because it causes friction to the current state of affairs.

There are many more like him in your department too scared to speak up, you know that's true. And this will not be the end of vaccines and masking. So what happens next time when the other 2 or 3 or 50 "Matt's" in your department decide they won't comply again? Do they all get fired? Do you simply take the same action and endanger the community in which I and much of my family live? Not without hearing from me and many more like me.

I have much respect for you, law enforcement, and the job it entails. But I deeply believe you got this one wrong, and I strongly request that you reconsider this disproportionate decision and reinstate Matt Keeley back to his deputized status as it was. In fact, simply based on the fact that he is the only one, he shouldn't be admonished at all, he should be promoted.

Allow him to perform as he has and look internally as to how you can better navigate his situation, knowing it will return tenfold in the future with other employees that finally find the courage to take the stance Matt has so boldly taken now. He is only *ahead* of his time.

I appreciate your consideration.

Mike Harman Jr.
Hanover County Resident